



***Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond
November 25-29, 2013***

Deaths of Alberta aboriginal children in care no 'fluke of statistics': More likely to die of accidents, suicide and homicide; children also more at risk if under care of federally funded on-reserve agencies

[Edmonton Journal](#)

November 26, 2013

Darcy Henton



UBC professor Shelly Johnson says many First Nations foster parents do not have proper training and support to deal with high-needs children.

Only nine per cent of Alberta children are aboriginal, yet they account for a staggering 78 per cent of children who have died in foster care since 1999.

Aboriginal children are also more likely to die if they are put in foster care on reserve,

a statistic that starkly highlights the federal/provincial funding disparity that gives off-reserve aboriginal children more services and more support.

According to an Edmonton Journal-Calgary Herald investigation, 145 children in Alberta have died in foster care since 1999. Of the 145, the provincial government lists ethnic information for 94 children, including 74 who were aboriginal.

Among the findings:

-31 of the 74 aboriginal children who died were in their teens; of those, 25 were aged 15 to 17.

-24 were infants; of those, 10 of them died from SIDS or from the consequences of prematurity.

-13 aboriginal children died in accidents; 12 committed suicide, 10 were the victims of homicide.

-45 aboriginal children died in the care of a provincially funded Children and Family Services Agency (CFSA) while 29 died in the care of an on-reserve Delegated First Nations Agencies (DFNA). However, DFNAs care for a fraction of the children that CFSAs do — in 2012-2013, 73 per cent of aboriginal children were in the care of a CFSA, 27 per cent in a DFNA. Therefore, since 1999, proportionately more children died in the care of a DFNA than a CFSA.

"There are an incredible number of kids dying in care each year," said Raven Sinclair, an aboriginal professor who teaches in the faculty of social work at the University of Regina. "This isn't just an accident. It is not a fluke of statistics. It is happening year after year."



Photo: University of Regina professor Raven Sinclair laments that the number of aboriginal children dying in care 'is not a fluke of statistics.' Credit: Supplied.

Experts blame the disproportionate rate of aboriginal children dying in care on poverty, substance abuse, substandard housing, the legacy of residential schools and a lack of supports and services in aboriginal communities.

Critical to the argument is a funding disparity between on- and off-reserve agencies.

In the early 1970s, Alberta First Nations began establishing their own on-reserve child welfare agencies, with the first on the Siksika First Nation in southern Alberta in 1973.

Since then, the province has signed 17 additional agreements with 40 of Alberta's 47 First Nations. These Delegated First Nations Agencies are funded by Ottawa, but regulated by Alberta.

They take care of children on reserves; those who are off-reserve are taken care of by the provincially funded Children and Family Services Agencies.

According to Jean Lafrance, a former Alberta child advocate and children's services assistant deputy minister, the government hoped delegating responsibility for First Nations children to aboriginal agencies on-reserve would result in more culturally appropriate programs, and reduce the apprehensions of children, but that hasn't happened.

In many ways, the transition hasn't been smooth. In 2002, a DFNA was temporarily suspended after a series of deaths; the province had to provide mentors for aboriginal caseworkers and help the understaffed agency with high caseloads. Band leaders have taken active roles in apprehensions and staffing decisions, and funds for child welfare services have been misspent.

And there have been repeated complaints about lack of funding.

Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Family and Child Caring Society and an associate professor at the University of Alberta, says aboriginal agencies receive about 22 per cent less in funding than provincial agencies. Her organization and the Assembly of First Nations took the matter to the Canadian Human Rights Commission in 2007. That case is still ongoing.



Photo: Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Family and Child Caring Society. Credit: Supplied.

"It is shocking to many people that in this day and age on the heels of the residential school fiasco that we have the government of Canada on trial for racial discrimination, simply to get it to do what it should do as part of a moral course, which is to provide equitable funding for these children and their families and give them a fighting chance at growing up safely in their homes," Blackstock said.

First Nations agencies argue the federal funding is flawed because it is based on the formula that six per cent of children on reserves will need child welfare services. In reality, the rate of children

in care can be as high as 18 per cent.

The federal government has since boosted funding for preventive services with an enhanced funding formula, but First Nations and the federal auditor general have said it still doesn't match the province's level of agencies funding.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada spokeswoman Valérie Haché said the department has boosted funding for aboriginal child welfare agencies nationally from \$193 million in 1996-1997 to approximately \$618 million in 2011-2012, plus an additional \$374 million in enhanced prevention focused funding.

Alberta DFNAs have received \$98 million since 2007 and are slated to receive \$20 million this year, she said.

"Improving the safety and well-being of First Nations children on reserve and child welfare services on reserve is a priority for our government," she said in an email.

But a 2010 evaluation of the enhanced funding could not determine whether the program is delivering reasonably comparable services to those provided by provincial agencies, or whether the additional funding is reducing the apprehensions of aboriginal children.

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Delegated First Nations Agencies simply haven't been able to afford the same level of services of CFSAs, such as programs to keep kids at home with their parents.

"If you had a family facing very serious problems, problems that might be solved by providing parenting programs, maybe a homemaker, maybe a child-care worker — those kind of services which are available for all children across Alberta through regular child welfare authorities were not being funded by the federal government until fairly recently," said Nico Trocme, a McGill University professor of social work. Statistics from the Ministry of Human Services seem to bear that out, showing far more non-aboriginal children receive home supports than aboriginal children.

According to 2012-13 figures, a total of 12,032 children in Alberta were receiving intervention services, either in the care of the government or in their family home. Aboriginal children made up 7,027 of that number; 82 per cent of them had been apprehended, while 18 per cent were receiving services at home.

In comparison, of the 5,005 non-aboriginal children in the system, only 54 per cent had been apprehended, while 46 per cent were receiving services at home.

The issue has been raised at two recent fatality inquiries in Alberta.

Carolyn Peacock, executive director of Kasohkowew Children's Society on the Samson First Nation at Hobbema, told a September inquiry federal funding doesn't cover programs for children with fetal alcohol syndrome or other disabilities on the reserve.

Alberta provincial court Judge Bart Rosborough raised similar concerns in a report into another death. "I recommend that Alberta investigate whether such a disparity exists and, if so, enter into consultations with Canada to eliminate that disparity."

The funding issue also results in staffing and training issues on reserves, including high caseloads and lack of supervision, which can lead to deaths.

"Child protection is failing our kids because child protection doesn't have the resources to effectively monitor what is going on in foster care and group care," said University of Victoria associate professor Jeannine Carriere, who has been contracted by Alberta in the past to review aboriginal deaths in care.

University of British Columbia assistant professor Shelly Johnson concurs: "We have foster parents that are quite poorly supported and social workers are desperate to place very high needs children in homes where foster parents may not have adequate training support."

Johnson, who headed a First Nations children's services agency in Victoria, adds:

"I don't think the answer is turning over a broken and flawed system and then paying aboriginal people 22 per cent less than everybody else to manage that misery."



Photo: With a braid of sweetgrass on her table, an aboriginal foster parent grieves the death of a child in her care. Credit: Ryan Jackson, Edmonton Journal.

Indeed, First Nations agencies blame high staff turnover on the simple fact they can't afford to match provincial caseworkers' salaries.

Darrin Keewatin, a former director of Kasohkewew Child Wellness Society in Hobbema, told the human rights tribunal his caseworkers often handled up to 35 cases compared to 20 for their provincial counterparts.

He also noted that — using the new money from the federal government — he hired three workers to do prevention work with at-risk families on the Samson First Nation, but ended up retraining them as front-line caseworkers due to chronic staffing issues. This problem was exacerbated by the fact his DFNA has to place many children with high medical needs in private facilities and group homes off-reserve.

"First Nations children in Alberta are the walking barrels of oil to those group homes and institutions," he said. "If all of my money is going to group care, how can I begin to develop a prevention program or do family counselling or any services?"

Human Services Minister Dave Hancock said his government is working with the chiefs from the province's three regional treaty areas on the funding issue.

"All children in Alberta are Alberta children and jurisdiction should not get in the way of appropriate service delivery," he said in a recent interview.

A move in 2004 to involve a person designated by the First Nation band council to help plan for a child's services has made a difference, he said. But Hancock conceded the over-representation of aboriginal care won't be resolved quickly.

Mark Hattori, assistant deputy minister of the child and family services division of Alberta Human Services, agreed that the province must work in partnership with aboriginal people to reduce the number of aboriginal children in care.

"Can we do a better job? Absolutely," he said. "We don't deny that there are things that need to be changed."

With files from Karen Kleiss, Edmonton Journal

About this data analysis

Our analysis of the deaths of aboriginal children in care is restricted by the incomplete data released to us by the Ministry of Human Services.

Of the ministry's death records for the 145 children who died in care between Jan. 1, 1999 and June 8, 2013, only 94 recorded ethnicity; 69 of which were aboriginal and five were recorded as Métis. Another 15 were Caucasian, and five were listed as "other," but a total of 51 had no ethnicity listed.

Therefore, when we refer to the percentage of aboriginal deaths compared to the total deaths, we are using only those cases for which ethnicity is known.

To put the number of deaths into context, there are about 8,500 to 9,000 children in the care of the Alberta government at any one time, according to data from the past five years.

We also asked the province for data on the number of aboriginal children being cared for by a provincially operated Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA) or a Delegated First Nation Agency (DFNA).

The ministry reported that in 2012-13, 7,027 aboriginal children were receiving intervention services from the government — 5,769 were in care, while another 1,258 hadn't been apprehended but were receiving help.

Of that total, 73 per cent of them, or 5,130, were in the care of a CFSA. The remaining 27 per cent, or 1,897, were in a DFNA.

Using the ethnic data that we know, we calculated that 74 aboriginal children died in care since Jan. 1, 1999, 45 in a CFSA and 29 in a DFNA. Applying the ratio of 73 per cent in a CFSA to 27 per cent in a DFNA, we calculated that on average, 3.4 aboriginal children died annually in a CFSA, and 2.4 aboriginal children died annually in a DFNA.

In applying those numbers to the 2013 figures, the result is a death rate of aboriginal children of 0.66/1,000 in the care of a CFSA, and a rate of 1.26/1,000 in the care of a DFNA.

Clearly, there are limitations to this data analysis. First, we do not have the ethnicities of all the deceased children. Second, we used 2012-13 figures to create an average rate, yet the percentage of children in a CFSA versus a DFNA could certainly have changed over the years. We did not have that information.

Finally, it's difficult to compare the percentage of the deceased children in care who are aboriginal with the percentage of children in care who are aboriginal. That's because the makeup of the in-care population has changed over the years.

For example, between 2008 and 2013, the percentage of children in care who were aboriginal rose from 60 per cent to 68 per cent. While the actual number has increased by only about 400 children, the percentage appears greater due to a drop in non-aboriginal children in care.

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Fatal Care: Foster care tragedies cloaked in secrecy: They suffocated in bed, committed suicide, succumbed to disease- 145 Alberta children died in foster care since 1999, and the government hasn't told you

[Edmonton Journal And Calgary Herald](#)

November 26, 2013

Karen Klees and Darcy Henton



In the last 14 years, 145 children have died in government care, nearly triple the number previously reported by the province. Many, like the child this father mourns at a gravesite west of Edmonton, were just infants. Photograph by: Ed Kaiser, Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - The Alberta government has dramatically under-reported the number of child

welfare deaths over the past decade, undermining public accountability and thwarting efforts at prevention and reform.

A six-month Edmonton Journal-Calgary Herald investigation found 145 foster children have died since 1999, nearly triple the 56 deaths revealed in government annual reports over the same period.

It is the first definitive count of child welfare fatalities in Alberta, based on death records unsealed by the province after a four-year legal battle. The figure includes all of the children who died in government care after child protection workers apprehended them from their families to keep them safe.

Crucially, however, the count is not yet complete: The ministry has not released death records for at-risk children that the government did not yet apprehend, or for children who were returned to their parents after time in care.

Cause of death

How 145 children have died between 1999 and 2013:

Disease/illness	50
Sudden infant death	14
Premature	14
Hanging	14
Cranial trauma	11
Collision	6
Drowning	4
Asphyxiation	3
Pneumonia	3
Sleep arrangement	3
Overdose	3
Hypothermia	3
Fire	2
Stabbing	1
Blunt force trauma	1
Alcohol poisoning	1
Massive trauma	1
Anoxic brain injury	1
Fall	1
Malnutrition	1
CO poisoning	1
Intestinal obstruction	1
Unknown	6

Journalists have identified at least 49 such children. There are likely dozens more.

This startling number of unpublicized deaths highlights the failure of a child death review system blighted by secrecy, disorganization, weak oversight and unmonitored recommendations.

To uncover the number of deaths, the Journal and Herald undertook an unprecedented review of 3,000 pages of ministry death records, historical fatality inquiry reports and lawsuits spanning 14 years.

An exhaustive analysis of those documents revealed alarming trends the government has never identified: A third of children who die in care are babies, another third are teenagers, and the vast majority are aboriginal.

These are their stories.

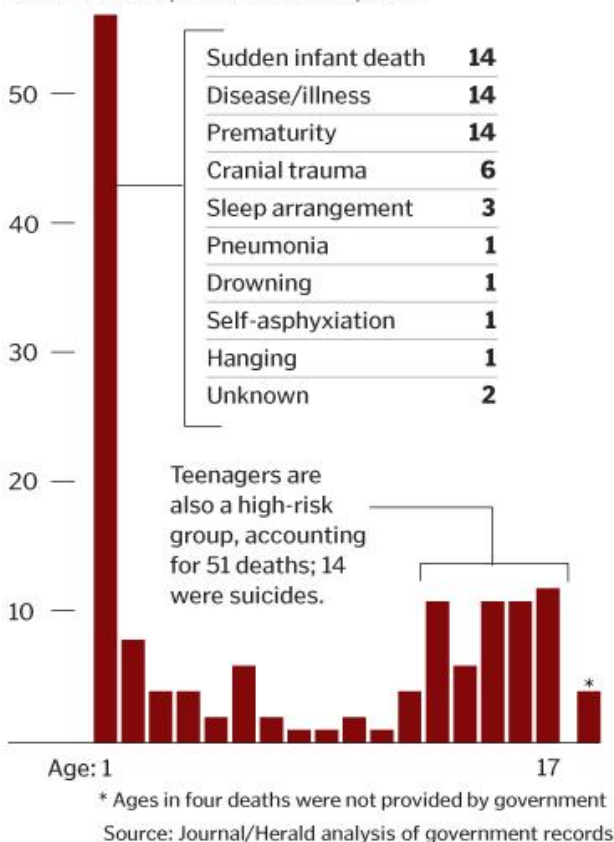
A boy makes a suicide pact with his mother and hangs himself in a group home. A girl is found slain and frozen in a ditch; another drinks herself to death. A mentally ill boy lays down on the railway tracks, his head gets crushed.

More than a dozen babies died inexplicably in their sleep, and many more died from preventable, sleep-related incidents. One died twisted in a foster parent's bedsheets, another suffocated in a collapsed bassinet, a third succumbed to untreated pneumonia while sleeping on the floor.

Among teens, more than two dozen young aboriginals overdosed on drugs, were beaten or stabbed to death, or committed suicide by hanging from basement rafters, playground equipment and closet bar rods.

How old are the children?

A total of 145 children, including 57 babies, died between Jan. 1, 1999 and June 8, 2013.



Three teens were found frozen outside, including two boys who died of hypothermia in a backyard and a public park. When a 14-year-old girl from the Sunchild First Nation was found frozen in a ditch, officials assumed she, too, had died from hypothermia. An autopsy found she had been killed and dumped. The government made no mention of her death.

Alberta child welfare workers apprehended all of these children from their families, in an effort to protect them from harm. Instead, they died.

(To put the number of deaths into context, there are about 8,500 to 9,000 children in care in Alberta at any one time, according to data from the past five years.)

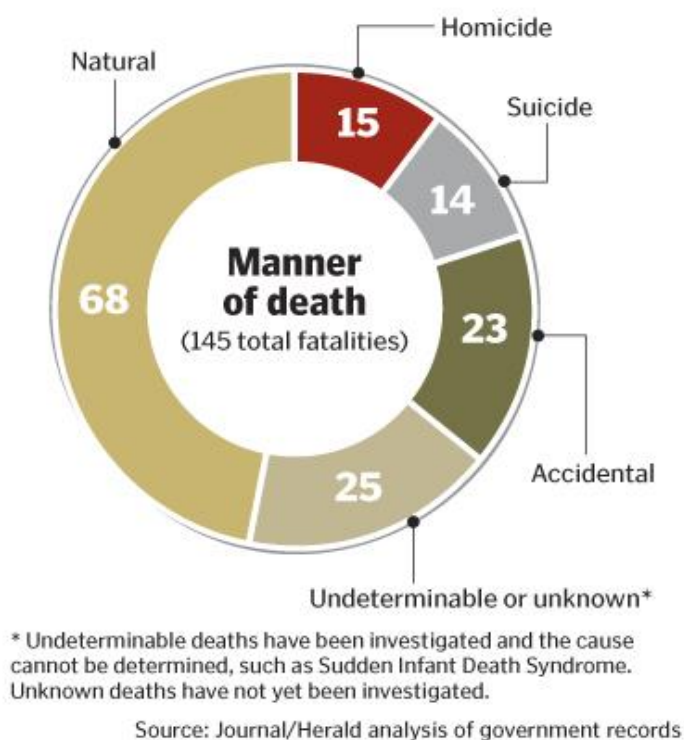
A fraction of the deaths were subject to investigation, and in cases where reviews were completed, recommendations were not tracked or monitored for implementation.

Alberta has no system for studying trends among children who die in provincial care.

"We owe it to the child victims to not only learn from their tragic deaths, but to prevent such tragedies in the future," says Gord Phaneuf, chief executive of the Child Welfare League of Canada. "We need to commit to this. There really are no more compelling issues than protecting vulnerable babies, toddlers, children and youth from preventable deaths, and from child maltreatment deaths in particular."

Phaneuf says governments must study individual deaths in the context of all child deaths, looking to identify which children are most at risk, and why.

"When you start to put the data together, and you do it over extended periods of time, you can discern patterns and trends that tell a very important and compelling story. We need that."



The Journal and Herald obtained the internal death records through a freedom of information request submitted by the Journal in 2009, that triggered a four-year legal battle. In June 2013, Alberta's information and privacy commissioner ruled in the Journal's favour and ordered the province to release death records dating back to Jan. 1, 1999. The records were to include age, ethnicity and circumstances of death for each child, along with recommendations that resulted from the deaths.

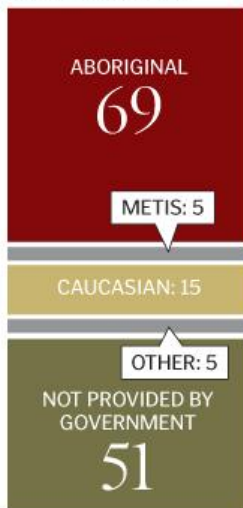
This September, the Ministry of Human Services released the internal death records for children who died while receiving in-care services, which means they were apprehended from their families and placed in group homes, foster or kinship care.

The ministry did not release death records for children who were reported to be at risk but were not apprehended, nor did they release death records for children who had been returned to their parents after time in care.

The Journal and Herald's investigation into failures of the \$684-million child intervention system also examined Alberta's child death review process, and found the process is mired in secrecy and bureaucracy. Dozens of elected officials, political appointees and bureaucrats operate in six different bodies under two different ministries and three different laws.

Ethnicity

The ethnic backgrounds of 145 children who have died in Alberta care:



Source: Journal/Herald analysis of government records

Recommendations that emerge from these bodies are not binding on government, they are not tracked or monitored for implementation and are not reviewed to see if changes have been effective in preventing child deaths.

People who work inside the system are barred from speaking publicly about their experiences and even the parents of deceased children cannot utter their dead child's name, for fear of breaking a law that bans the identification of children in care, even after they die.

In the end, the fallout from these deaths is widespread: 12 lawsuits totalling more than \$8.7 million, 13 lengthy criminal trials, and the incalculable emotional toll paid by parents, foster parents and child protection workers responsible for

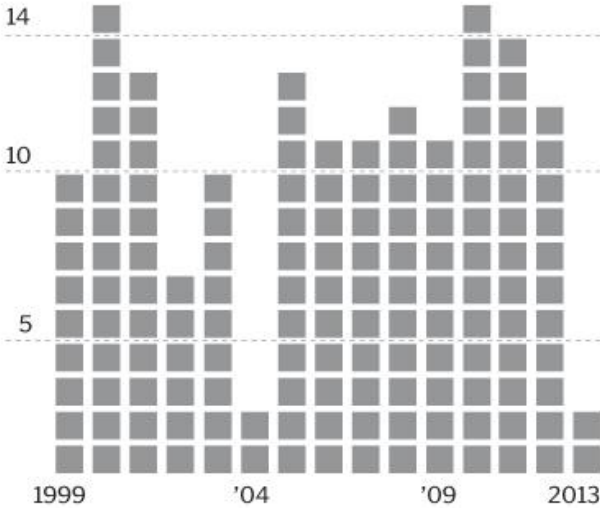
children in the care of the state.

Yet in an interview for this series, Human Services Minister Dave Hancock expressed satisfaction with the way the system works. He noted that there are some areas of duplication — and some room for improvement — but overall he concluded that child deaths in Alberta were getting the appropriate amount of investigation and review in the ministry.

"In the death review process," Hancock said, "we have, I think, a fairly strong organization."

The loss: 145 deaths in 14 years

Between Jan. 1, 1999 and June 8, 2013, 145 children died while receiving in-care services, which means they had been apprehended from their parents and were living in foster, kinship or group care. The figures do not include children who were receiving out-of-care services from the ministry when they died.



Source: Journal/Herald analysis of government records

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Attawapiskat Fire Destroys Homes, Residents To Be Flown Out Today

[Huffington Post](#)

November 23, 2013



ATTAWAPISKAT, Ont. - About 70 residents of the remote Attawapiskat First Nation in northern Ontario will be flown to Kapuskasing starting today.

The band council declared an emergency this week in the James Bay coast community following a fire in a housing complex.

Charlie Angus, the NDP MP for the area, says two flights are planned, with the first scheduled to leave the First Nation around mid-day.

The Ontario government is arranging the air transportation out the community.

Angus says the housing complex is a "giant set of construction trailers with little holding cells that families are living in."

In 2011, Attawapiskat became a flashpoint for relations between the Harper government and First Nations after a housing crisis triggered a state of emergency.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper accused the band of mismanaging finances and Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence staged a six-week hunger protest over living conditions on reserves and treaty issues.

Her protest sparked nationwide demonstrations of support.

First Nations exposed to pollutants in Ontario's 'chemical valley'

[City News](#)

November 25, 2013

Benjamin Shingler



A sign for the Aamjiwnaang First Nation Resource Centre is located across the road from NOVA Chemicals in Sarnia on April 21, 2007. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Craig Glover.

A new study is drawing attention to the health problems being faced by a First Nations community living near one of Canada's most industrialized areas.

Members of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation living on a reserve near Sarnia, Ont., have long suspected harmful chemicals were behind an unusually low male birth rate and slew of other reported health issues.

Now, tests performed by a McGill University professor suggest mothers and children are being exposed to higher-than-average levels of harmful hormone-blocking pollutants.

While the study doesn't prove that the pollutants are to blame for earlier research that found baby girls outnumbered boys by a two-to-one ratio in the community, it does suggest a possible link.

The reserve at the centre of the study is located near a patch of southern Ontario that some environmental activists call "chemical valley."

There are 60 industrial facilities found within a 25 kilometre radius of Aamjiwnaang lands.

"It's the first study to really show that mothers and children in the area are exposed to a number of pollutants," said Niladri Basu, a McGill professor and the study's lead author.

More detailed research is needed to establish a connection between pollutants, health risks and the surrounding environment, Basu said.

Residents of Aamjiwnaang have been calling for such a study for years, though a lack of funding continues to impede more detailed research.

Ada Lockridge, who helped found Aamjiwnaang's environmental committee, said pollution is a fact of life for the reserve's roughly 800 residents.

Like others in the community, Lockridge keeps a special plastic bucket — as part of a group known as the "bucket brigade" — to collect environmental samples that can be tested for toxins whenever the air seems especially poor. The results are sent to a U.S.-based monitoring organization.

"It's a beautiful place, but there is all kinds of industry close by," she said.

According to Lockridge, the evidence continues to mount in favour of stricter environmental controls in the area.

"Everything we do gets us a little further, but it's moving very slowly," she said. "Every study we've ever done, people say, 'this is cause for concern,' but more studies need to be done."

Approximately 40 per cent of Canada's chemical industry is clustered in the area, according to a 2007 report by the Canadian environmental group Ecojustice.

Located at the southernmost tip of Lake Huron on the border between Ontario and Michigan, activists say the area has become one of Canada's pollution hot spots — lined with chemical plants, manufacturing plants, and refineries.

A 2006 community survey by Aamjiwnaang's environment committee cited a number of health issues, including miscarriages, chronic headaches and asthma. Forty per cent of band members surveyed required an inhaler.

Elaine MacDonald, a scientist who co-authored the 2007 Ecojustice report, is hopeful Basu's study will encourage further research.

As it stands, it's difficult to draw a direct correlation between pollutants and health issues such as the low male birth rate.

"This is a start, and it's a great start, but to me there's so much that needs to be done, and there's no money," she said.

MacDonald said it's been difficult to get government funding at both the federal and provincial level. A more comprehensive study that includes the surrounding area, Lambton County, has stalled due to lack of funding.

"The major exposures in this community are via air, so I would like to see a study focusing on air pollutants," MacDonald said.

For the recent McGill study, 43 mother-child pairs from the community were tested for environmental pollutants. Blood, urine and hair samples were taken from those who participated.

Exposures were higher-than-average for chemicals such as cadmium, possibly mercury, and polychlorinated biphenyls or PCBs.

Potential sources of the chemicals are industry, the general environment, and the home. It's not conclusive which is to blame in this case.

PCBs are used in industrial applications such as coolants in transformers and motors and have been largely banned, although they can remain in the environment for years.

Previous studies of other populations have linked exposure to PCBs with low male birth rates.

Aamjiwnaang's low male birth rate was documented in research published in the U.S. journal Environmental Health Perspectives.

Between 1999 and 2003, the sex ratio of girls to boys was roughly 33 per cent for boys and 67 per cent for girls.

AFN chief rejects federal proposals for aboriginal children's education



Assembly of First Nations Chief Shawn Atleo at his office in Ottawa. DAVE CHAN for The Globe and Mail (Dave Chan For The Globe and Mail)

First Nations have flatly rejected federal proposals for legislation covering education for aboriginal children.

Shawn Atleo, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, says they are not acceptable and he has set out five conditions for the federal government to meet.

In an open letter to Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt, Atleo says there is a strong consensus among First Nations about what needs to be done.

Atleo says any agreement must allow for native control of education, provide a statutory funding guarantee, recognize native languages and culture, provide shared oversight and ensure continuing and meaningful engagement.

He says he wants a clear commitment to these conditions.

There will be no compromise on principles, he adds.

The government has been wrestling with the native education issue for years and is now circulating draft legislation that it hopes will become law by the next school year. Aboriginal peoples have long complained that their schools are short-changed compared with provincial education systems.

First Nations also say they don't want to be subject to the oversight of a federal bureaucracy.

"We must work together on a mutual plan that fully respects and reflects partnership, that is consistent with treaty relationships and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," Atleo said in his letter.

He said control is a key:

"First Nation control of the education of our children must be the overriding, paramount principle of all our work."

Atleo said the process can still be successful.

"We must remove every reason and every excuse to not act – but rather create the proper and rightful environment to act now together for our children today and tomorrow."

But he warned that there will be no bending.

"We were partners in the past and we can be partners again, but First Nations will never compromise on fundamental principles, our rights, our responsibilities and the well-being of our children."

He invited the federal government to stand with First Nations "in affirming for all Canadians a solemn commitment to reconciliation and to a path forward that never again will our children be victimized in the name of education, never again will our dignity, languages and cultures be denied and desecrated."

About four in 10 Inuit are high school graduates (survey): More than half of drop-outs plan to go back to school at some point

[Nunatsiaq News](#)

November 27, 2013



A new study shows that less than half of Inuit adults between the ages of 18 and 44 hold a high school diploma. (FILE PHOTO)

Fewer than half of adult Inuit hold a high school diploma, according to new data from Statistics Canada's Aboriginal Peoples Survey released this week.

The new data shows that 42 per cent of Inuit

adults between the ages of 18 and 44 are high school graduates, while a part of that same group — 15 per cent — left school at least once before obtaining their diploma.

The data is the first to be released from the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, information collected to provide insight into social and economic issues among First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit adults aged 18 to 44.

In it, Inuit graduation rates were well below the 72 per cent of First Nations living off reserve and 77 per cent of Métis who reported having a high school diploma.

In comparison, 89 per cent of Canada's non-Aboriginal population had at least a high school diploma.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those who reported completing high school said they participated in more extra-curricular activities outside of school and read more books than those who dropped out.

Higher percentages of graduates reported having many close friends who valued an education. Those who completed high school were also more likely than drop-outs to report they received support from school staff during their last year in school.

On the other hand, drop-outs reported leaving school to deal with money problems, pregnancy or childcare issues or due to a general lack of interest.

Graduates were more likely to be employed, and tend to earn between \$10,000 to \$20,000 more in a year than those who didn't complete high school.

But of those Inuit who never completed high school, 16 per cent went on to complete some form of post-secondary education, like a college diploma or a trades certificate.

And as of 2012, 55 per cent of Inuit had plans to further their education at some point.

Thirty years later, little done to address suicide rate among aboriginal teens in care

[Calgary Herald](#)

November 26, 2013

Darcy Henton



Métis youth Richard Stanley Cardinal killed himself in 1984. The 17-year-old, who had been placed in 28 different homes during his 14 years in the child welfare system, hanged himself from a cross bar he had nailed between two trees near his last foster home in Sangudo, northwest of Edmonton. Photograph by: Supplied, Edmonton Journal

Nearly 30 years after a fatality inquiry into a high-profile suicide generated sweeping recommendations to prevent similar deaths, aboriginal teens in care in Alberta continue to kill themselves, fatality inquiry judges continue to repeat the same recommendations and the government hasn't developed a plan to deal with the issue.

According to internal government records obtained by the Edmonton Journal and Calgary Herald, 14 teens in government care committed suicide between 1999 and 2013. Of those, 10 were aboriginal and two were Métis.

"It's sad to say we're still at the same place in terms of the amount of suicides that are happening among our people," said filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, who made a National Film Board documentary about the tragic life of Métis youth Richard Stanley Cardinal, who killed himself in 1984.

The 17-year-old, who had been placed in 28 different homes during his 14 years in the child welfare system, hanged himself from a cross bar he had nailed between two trees near his last foster home in Sangudo, northwest of Edmonton. The documentary, *Cry from the Diary of a Métis Child*, lamented that he "never got what he needed most — to go home."

[*Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Métis Child*](#) by [Alanis Obomsawin](#), [National Film Board of Canada](#)

At the time, the fatality inquiry report into Cardinal's death noted that the only way to try to reduce the high suicide rate among aboriginal people was "to take a very broad approach to the problem."

The report contained 22 wide-ranging recommendations addressing the courts, the provincial government, schools, hospitals, aboriginal organizations and even the media. It called for child care workers and foster parents to be better trained in aboriginal culture, suicide and depression, and for the government to establish mental health facilities for children. It also called for the recruitment of more aboriginal child welfare workers and foster parents.

Fatality inquiry reports and death reviews have been making variations of the same recommendations ever since. Many have repeatedly stressed the critical need for accessible, local in-patient mental health and addictions treatment facilities for teens and the need for communities and child protection workers to ensure aboriginal children retain strong ties to their culture.

But the recommendations, which are not binding on government and are not even tracked for implementation, have largely been ignored.

A confidential 2005 special study on suicides involving Alberta children in care, which was obtained by the Journal and the Herald, cited depression, mental health problems, prolonged grief, early childhood loss, violence and social isolation as contributing factors to the suicide rate.

It also pointed out that little had been done to address the issue.

“At this time, Children’s Services does not have any suicide prevention initiatives directed to the children and youth who are receiving intervention services,” the report noted, adding suicide was the second leading cause of injury death among First Nations people in Alberta.

Just this year, Alberta’s child and youth advocate’s investigation into the suicide of another Métis teenager produced a report called “Remembering Brian,” which reiterated some of the previous recommendations.

Among the suicide cases since 1999 was the death in a group home of a 17-year-old boy who made a suicide pact with his mother in 2000. He had repeatedly attempted to kill himself, and caseworkers had discussed the need to remove the closet bar in his room from which he eventually hanged himself. There was miscommunication, however, and the bar was left in place.

That same year, a 13-year-old Métis boy from northern Alberta hanged himself shortly after moving with his foster family to northern Ontario. Like Cardinal, he had been in and out of foster homes most of his life — 25 homes in 12 years.

Although he had attempted suicide previously, had spoken of suicide at least seven times and scored extremely high on a suicide probability test, he was placed with foster parents who hadn’t been trained in suicide prevention. A special case review following his death revealed that Ontario Children’s Aid Society workers were not advised of the possibility he could commit suicide. But there was no fatality inquiry for him and no newspaper headlines.

A 16-year-old aboriginal teen from northern Alberta hanged himself in the home of his aunt in Regina. He had been moved 30 times during his short life. There was no special case review of his death and no recommendations made to prevent similar deaths.

In addition to the 12 documented suicides, there have also been two cases in which suicidal aboriginal teens died — one by running into traffic and the other by overdosing on drugs — but the cause of death was listed as accidental or undetermined.

A 17-year-old boy who jumped from a child protection worker’s vehicle, stripped off his clothes and ran into oncoming highway traffic in 2005 had numerous mental

health issues and behavioural problems. His death was linked to an organic brain disorder resulting from his mother being “high on solvents throughout the pregnancy.”

The fatality inquiry judge called for child protection workers to be trained in suicide prevention, urged the ministry to “expand and improve” mental health services and drug treatment, and advised the ministry to establish a task force to study the issue of how to treat youth who refuse treatment.

Other cases also have connections to mental health and addictions problems. An acutely psychotic 17-year-old boy was crushed by a train after going missing from Alberta Hospital in 2006 and a 15-year-old boy hanged himself at a northern Alberta healing centre last year.

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Del Graff, Alberta’s child and youth advocate, said the only way to change the pattern of teen suicides is for the government to have a plan — “a plan that is in partnership with aboriginal stakeholders and a plan that is committed to by everyone.”

“Otherwise, significant movement just doesn’t seem to happen,” he said.

Graff conceded one of the stumbling blocks thus far has been the complexity of the issue.

Human Services Minister Dave Hancock said the province has been active in efforts to reduce aboriginal suicides and provide better access to mental health treatment, but acknowledges more can be done.

“In terms of access on a timely basis to the right kind of resources, we can do a lot better job and we are actively engaged in that work now,” he said.

Hancock also promised to begin tracking the implementation of fatality inquiry recommendations.

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The most comprehensive fatality inquiry report on aboriginal teen suicide prevention stemmed from a “suicide cluster” on Calgary’s Tsuu T’ina First Nation in which three teens — two of them siblings — killed themselves between 2004 and 2006.

In the 2007 report, the judge noted the suicide rate for aboriginals remains three to four times the rate for other Canadians.

The report stressed the need to teach youth about their culture and to train adults who work with teens to recognize those who are at risk for suicidal behaviour and get them help. It also called for crisis response measures in communities where multiple aboriginal suicides occur within a short period.

Tsuu T'ina wasn't the only aboriginal community hit with multiple teen suicides in a short span.

Around the same time, a 15-year-old girl on the Siksika reserve, east of Calgary, hanged herself while on the phone talking to her boyfriend after he had ended their relationship. Her Jan. 2, 2006, death was part of another suicide cluster, and triggered the establishment of a mental health and addictions in-patient treatment centre on the reserve — the first of its kind in Alberta.

Also in southern Alberta, the Blood Tribe or Kainai First Nation works with troubled youth at a teen ranch where they teach academic subjects and life skills with an emphasis on healing through cultural teachings. They also operate a treatment centre.

Improving aboriginal teens' connection to their culture does seem to help with suicide prevention.

The province's 2005 suicide study noted that Canadian researchers reviewing teen suicides in British Columbia had identified six measures of maintaining cultural continuity and found communities in which all six measures were in place recorded no teen suicides, while communities where there were only a few or no measures in place recorded a suicide rate above the national average.

In 2004, Alberta launched the Aboriginal Youth and Communities Empowerment Strategy, in which the province provides grants to aboriginal communities to help them develop such youth programs as cultural camps, after-school activities and hockey leagues.

An evaluation six years ago provided feedback from youth, elders and community leaders that the program was inspiring hope, said Calgary medical officer of health Dr. Richard Musto, who is responsible for Alberta Health Services' aboriginal suicide prevention efforts.

The program involves about 24 communities and four urban organizations, and has provided suicide prevention training to more than 650 people in aboriginal communities across Alberta, he said. However, he couldn't say if the programs have reduced aboriginal youth suicides or suicide attempts.

For her part, Obomsawin remains hopeful the teen suicide trend can be reversed by aboriginal young people themselves adopting a new outlook on their place in society.

"I have talked to a lot of young people who have gone through hell and many of them have tried to kill themselves, but something is going on now that's very, very encouraging," the filmmaker said. "Young people themselves are realizing who they are. There is a very strong movement walking a different road now."

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First Nations seniors forced to leave communities: Government home care program not adequate to keep aging seniors at home, critics say

[CBC News](#)

Nov 26, 2013 6:00 AM ET



Clara and Tenna Boyce live in Eabametoong First Nation. They want to stay in the community, but Tenna may soon need more home care than the local Home and Community Care program can provide. (Melanie Ferrier/CBC)

Seniors in Eabametoong First Nation are struggling to stay in their community as they age.

A federally funded home care program operates five days a week, but the co-ordinator of care in Eabametoong says the program doesn't help seniors live longer in their own homes.

"There's only so many hours that we can offer during the week," Nancy Keeskitay said. "Then, when holidays come, it gets harder for them."

Keeskitay said seniors have to move to Thunder Bay if they require around-the-clock care. With more support in their own community, she said, some of these seniors could age at home instead.

Currently the Home and Community Care office in Eabametoong isn't equipped to operate 24-hours a day. The office operates from Monday to Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

"We [don't] have the people to look after them or the facility to put them in — especially an elder with dialysis," said Felicia Sagutch, a community councillor in charge of health services.

Sagutch said Eabametoong needs more financial support to make that happen.

Daily care can be problematic



Felicia Sagutch, Ann Waswa and Nancy Keeskitay are in charge of home care in Eabametoong First Nation. They say services provided through the Home and Community Care program help take the stress off caregivers, but don't necessarily help seniors live longer in the community. (Melanie Ferrier/CBC)

In an email to CBC Thunder Bay news, Health Canada says its First Nations and Inuit Home and Community Care program "helps to prevent or delay health deterioration and complications."

The funding provides "home care services to more than 26,000 First Nation and Inuit clients and provides over 2.5 million hours of service annually," according to the federal government. In addition to the care for the elderly, this includes support for people of all ages with "chronic and acute illness or disability to safely live in their homes and communities."

Nevertheless, elders in Northwestern Ontario have to move hundreds of kilometres away from their homes when they need care beyond what is provided in their communities.

That could one day be the case for Tenna Boyce, a 78-year-old living in Eabametoong with his wife, Clara, their foster daughter and her two children. He has lived in Eabametoong his whole life.

Boyce's kidneys don't work properly and he has to give himself dialysis four to five times a day — a task he performs by flushing fluids through a tube in his stomach. A personal support worker comes a few times a week to change the bandages around that tube.

Boyce said he doesn't know how much longer he'll be able to do dialysis for himself. Lately, he's been forgetting to do it.

"I have to tell him when to do his dialysis," said Clara. "He has trouble remembering."

Taking stress off families

Keeskitay said Eabametoong's Home and Community Care tries to do what it can with three personal support workers, two home management workers, two home support workers and one mental health worker.

Services include changing bandages, administering medications, foot care, bathing, preparing meals, chopping wood (many homes are heated with wood furnaces), boiling water (not all tap water is safe to drink), laundry, cleaning floors, winterizing the house, and so on.

Despite what they are able to do, Keeskitay said she's not sure they're helping elders stay in their homes in the community.

"It's pretty hard to say. I can't be certain and say, 'Yes, we are' ... because I don't know," she said.

Home care nurse Ann Waswa, who works five days a month, said the care provided takes stress "off families who have been trying to assist to assist their loved ones at these times of their lives."

But Waswa noted that, while providing "a little nursing care" and some general house cleaning, is helpful for their clients, she isn't sure it's enough to keep them in their homes.

Respite services also need to be expanded, said Waswa.

"You can let someone take a two-hour nap or you can let them go out to the store by staying with their elder," she said. "But I think respite really [should] be a week or more."

Meanwhile, the Boyces are coping as long as possible on their own, delaying the decision to move to Thunder Bay.

"I don't know whether I'll be happy or said if I have to go to the city, said Tenna Boyce. "I know that I won't be able to see the people that I know."

This is the second story in a CBC News series examining long-term care in remote First Nations. Wednesday's story looks at Eabametoong First Nation's plans to keep its senior citizens in the community.

Why government in the North needs youth voices

[Globe and Mail](#)

Nov. 26 2013, 7:00 AM EST

Jaxson Khan and Maximillian Seunik



School children try to get close to hunters returning from a seal hunt to the small hamlet of Cape Dorset, Nunavut, Canada on November 10, 2010. (Peter Power/Peter Power/The Globe and Mail)

Early this month, we travelled to Iqaluit as part of a team of young leaders from across the country who led a mission to the North. Known as Junior Team Canada (organized by the non-profit Global Vision), we and other young leaders ages 15-25 from the provinces and territories congregated in Nunavut to talk about resource development, linguistic preservation, safe shipping, and building sustainable communities. Students from the provinces were able to speak with many young

people from the North, particularly Inuit youth from Iqaluit, as well as youth from the surrounding regions of Nunavut.

The meeting was part of Canada taking up the chair post for the Arctic Council. There are no youth on the council, but from our experience up North, including them would yield significant benefits. Along with meetings with business, political, and educational leaders, we also came to learn about the unique cultural heritage of the Inuit people and Nunavut. Nunavut is a vast land containing over 30,000 people, over 9,000 of whom live in Iqaluit alone, with a patchwork quilt of some 30 isolated communities making up the rest of the population.

Our driver around Baffin Island and the outskirts of Iqaluit – which has almost a third of Nunavut's 30,000 people – was an Ethiopian immigrant named Joshua who took us to the edge of Frobisher Bay, where we beheld our first Arctic sunset, the sky, sea and snow reflecting a kaleidoscope of colours. He remarked that this is "the real Canada."

We found it hard to talk at first. The Inuit we met were generally reserved with us, sometimes replying with short answers or skirting around more in-depth questions. A lot of Inuit youth are passionate about things that aren't exactly common hobbies in the provinces, like hunting everything from seals to polar bears. Despite our enthusiasm and eagerness to connect, we didn't always know where to start. We questioned what it really means to be Canadian, upon the realization that this identity isn't always common ground for dialogue.

What eventually broke the ice – no pun intended – was simple, real, human connection, particularly for us older students, over some beers and good laughs. We were able to start revelling in the simple joys of our lives. We learned about some of the things to do up North, about the way of life, as well as commenting on the ups and downs of living in a big city like Toronto versus a quieter place like Iqaluit. And our conversations became serious too.

From our conversation with many Inuit, especially young people, suicide is a crisis. In a community so small, often the end of a relationship with a girlfriend or boyfriend – which can be seen as one's only option, or "only chance," as told to us by one youth – can mean the end of a life. Having a girlfriend or boyfriend may be seen as "the only chance" because, in a community of only a few thousand at most, it may be difficult to make things work with more than a couple other individuals of the same or similar age. One might end up alone and that's a tough future to face, especially being young.

Why is this happening? From our observations and interviews, there is a fundamental lack of access to key, culturally appropriate services. Mental health has seen a lot of interest from media and civil society in the last couple years, especially with a highly visible rise in adolescent suicides at schools and universities. Key

statistics have appeared relative to depression and anxiety, and it is crucial to break down the stigma surrounding mental health issues. But, up North, according to Health Canada, the suicide rate is eleven times higher than the rest of Canada.

The logistical challenges of connecting tiny, often icebound, communities located across a region roughly the size of Germany are immense. For families, day cares are often booked to capacity, and many programs for young mothers exist only in Iqaluit. There appears to be a huge gap between what is available in Iqaluit in contrast to smaller communities, and a huge gap between what is available in Iqaluit and what is available in the provinces.

At the same time, an element of Inuit culture that surprised us was the institutionalized role of elders. If individuals have a problem, the go-to response is to “ask an elder,” because they are the ones who have “persevered” through Inuit society’s great upheaval from nomadism to permanent settlements. As it was solemnly described to us, “Elders are our jewels.” We began to reflect on what the rest of the Canada is doing for its elders, whether through retirement homes or pension plans. Perhaps the most accurate depiction we heard is that “the elders are caught between two worlds, though the young people often say they are caught in two worlds.”

When we asked some young people what we, as Southerners, could do here they suggested encouraging Canadian institutions to set up subsidiaries in Nunavut to encourage investment and provide more advanced job opportunities, facilitating greater educational exchange for Inuit youth to receive skills in the South, working to counteract brain drain, and collaborating – not dictating – on issues like youth mental health.

The Inuit youth said that they are excited to take charge of their communities and foster pan-Canadian collaborations. For Canadians from the provinces, our responsibility is helping to provide tools for Northern and Inuit communities to find success on their own terms. Empowering young leaders will help the North create this future.

Jaxson Khan is a Global Shaper of the World Economic Forum, a co-founder of the Globe and Mail's student advisory council, and a student at Huron University College at Western University. Maximillian Seunik is a Morehead-Cain scholar and Canadian student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

First Nations crises mishandled: Damage from flooding in many areas inadequately managed

[Montreal Gazette](#)

November 27, 2013

Mark Kennedy

From floods to fires, emergencies on First Nations reserves are inadequately managed by the federal government and the effect on dislocated aboriginal families has been severe, says Canada's auditor general.

Michael Ferguson's report Tuesday found the federal Aboriginal Affairs Department had not taken "sufficient steps" to support First Nations communities struck by emergencies.

Moreover, he found the department's annual \$19-million budget for emergency management wasn't large enough, and it has had to reallocate funds from other programs to scrape by.

"Natural disasters in Canada are becoming more frequent, intense, and costly," Ferguson wrote.

"According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, many First Nations communities are considered at risk of emergencies due to their isolation and geographic location. In addition, their ability to effectively deal with emergency events when they occur is affected by their poor socio-economic conditions, low education levels, and few economic opportunities."

In four years studied by Ferguson's auditors, the federal government spent at least \$448 million supporting emergency-management activities on reserves. His conclusion was blunt.

"The safety and well-being of First Nations communities on reserve are being adversely affected in significant ways because of their vulnerability to emergencies and to the cumulative effects of these emergency events."

He found that not all communities had plans for managing emergencies, and those that existed were outdated and incomplete.

Ferguson said the three major emergencies on reserves are floods, fire and the failure of critical services such as power and drinking water.

"First Nations would also include social risks, such as suicides, as giving rise to emergencies." In the four years studied - between 2009 and 2013 - 447 emergencies occurred in 241 communities, representing about 39 per cent of all First Nations reserves.

Auditors visited 10 First Nations communities to understand the recent impact of emergencies. In the three regions visited, at least 9,500 people had been evacuated due to fires and flooding in 2011. By May 15, 2013, about 2,000 of those had not yet returned to their homes.

Ferguson found that "severe and repeated flooding in some communities caused isolation and family disruptions due to evacuation to other sites for long periods of time, including interruption in education." As well, flooding caused "severe damage to houses" and created mould that caused health risks. Water and sewage systems were also damaged by floods.

Traditional grounds for ceremonies, burials and other sacred sites were being eroded and are at risk of being lost due to repeated flooding. And the livelihoods of First Nations peoples are also affected through loss of income and business closures during evacuations. In the House of Commons, New Democrat MP Jean Crowder criticized the government for always reacting inadequately to emergencies.

"When is the minister going to end this cycle of waiting for disasters to happen and act to fix the problem that caused these emergencies?" she asked.

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Youth Education A Priority for Ontario Regional Chief Beardy

[Net Newsledger](#)

November 27, 2013



Ontario Regional Chief Stan Beardy

Ontario Regional Chief Beardy Focused on Youth

THUNDER BAY – The Chiefs of Ontario have placed Youth Education at the top of the priority list. Ontario Regional Chief Stan Beardy and the First Nation leadership in Ontario are united in their rejection of the federal proposal on a First Nations Education Act and have announced plans to implement their own education vision through a direct action strategy which will be implemented in First Nation

communities across the province.

"We discussed education at length over the last two days and along with maintaining our rejection of the federal legislation on education we also collectively affirm our inherent right to establish and control our own educational systems and

institutions,” said Regional Chief Stan Beardy. “Additionally, we are developing a plan of action to assert our jurisdiction over education.”

Align the Education Playing Field

First Nations in Ontario insist that federal and provincial governments align their respective laws, regulations and policies to conform to the jurisdiction of Indigenous Peoples.

“Our people have agreed that we must continue to assert our inherent jurisdiction over education by developing and implementing our own education laws and regulations which will lead to the establishment of our own education standards and systems,” said Grand Chief Gordon Peters who holds the education portfolio for the Chiefs in Ontario.

Stopping Federal First Nations Education Act

“First Nations in Ontario vowed to stop the federal First Nation Education Act and will refuse to abide by or implement the Act if it is unilaterally pushed through parliament. Action is currently underway garnering public and political support for our position. We continue developing strategies based on all available options including challenging resource extraction, direct action and litigation,” said Beardy.

The conservative government released the federal government document “A Proposal for a Bill on First Nation Education” in October. Prior to the public release of the proposal, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs stated to the National Chiefs Committee on education that he would not proceed with the act, if there was enough First Nation opposition.

“We have offered recommendations on how the consultation process could have been more meaningful for First Nations and on how we can be accommodated by coming to a common understanding of funding inequities prior to a proposal for a bill, and it has completely fell on deaf and unwilling ears,” said Beardy.

“Proposing bills and passing legislation before dialoguing on funding has never been acceptable to First Nations, nor will it ever be,” Peters added.

“There is never going to be a positive move forward in relations with Indigenous peoples in Canada if proposals for bills and legislation are rammed down our throats. This just isn’t going to fly with our youth, the very population the federal government purports to be doing this for.”

We Are Born With the Songs Inside Us profiles First Nations activists

Straight.com

November 27, 2013

Alexander Varty



We Are Born With the Songs Inside Us By Katherine Palmer Gordon. Harbour, 247 pp, softcover

There's nothing wrong with keeping one's ambitions small: they're a lot easier to fulfill.

We Are Born With the Songs Inside Us, subtitled *Lives and Stories of First Nations People in British Columbia*, is not a grand history of aboriginal culture in our province, although that's long overdue. Instead, it's a collection of 16 short, journalistic profiles of First Nations activists, ranging from businessman and former NHL star Gino Odjick to Stz'uminus educator Anne Tenning. There's no overarching narrative and little attempt to contextualize these lives outside of the premise author Katherine Palmer Gordon outlined to Shawn A-in-chut Atleo in a 2008 conversation.

"Most people read nothing but bad press about First Nations, and yet there are so many Aboriginal Canadians doing great things," the Gabriola-based author told the Assembly of First Nations' Ahousaht-born national chief, who is among those interviewed here. "They're an inspiration to the young people....I think a lot of people out there would be interested and inspired to read about people like you. What do you think?"

Atleo, Palmer Gordon reports, replied, "Katherine, you *have* to write this book." So she did. And although her goal was only to introduce mainstream Canada to a few big-hearted and passionate advocates for aboriginal justice, she's succeeded in humanizing the reconciliation process both settlers and Natives now find themselves embarked upon.

Palmer Gordon has a bare-bones style, but that serves these stories well. So many of her subjects have had stark encounters with ingrained prejudice or the residential-school system that drama is inherent in their telling. Many are also frank about their own foibles or failings; a common thread here is recovery, whether from self-destructive behaviour or from loss of contact with the culture of their birth. Neither of those particular wounds are specific to First Nations individuals, of course, and we can all take courage from these survivors' honesty.

One gets the sense, too, that Palmer Gordon is a careful and compassionate listener. Two of her subjects, environmental analyst Lisa Webster-Gibson and marine biologist Penny White, are neighbours of mine, yet I feel that I know them much better after reading their stories than I did from casual conversation. And in a sense, all of the people profiled here are our neighbours. Although *We Are Born With the Songs Inside Us* is but an introduction to their lives, it's a welcome one.

Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company performing Rez Christmas

[News Talk 650 CKOM](#)

Nov 27, 2013 4:57pm

Kelly Malone



A scene from the 2013 Rez Christmas production. Kelly Malone/News Talk Radio

The annual Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company is back with the eighth play in the Rez Christmas series.

Since 2001 the company has been taking their Saskatoon audience on a holiday journey through stories of people on a fictional reserve in Saskatchewan.

This year's play Mekiwin: The Gift brings the audience into the life of an elderly woman waiting for her granddaughter at Christmas while another character recuperates in the hospital after a snow blower accident.

"If I were to just randomly see this play it would really touch my heart," explained actor Lacey Eninew.

"To see a play where there is real portrayal, there is real aboriginal people playing aboriginal people and it's honest. It's written by an aboriginal person. It has a perspective that I could relate to."

Eninew has been involved with the Rez Christmas series since 2010 and is playing the role of the elderly woman waiting for her granddaughter.

"It hits a personal note for me. It really focuses on an honest portrayal of Indian people and there is lots of humour. My dad always told me that the heart of the Cree language is humour," she said.

The play intertwines English and Cree languages and presents the show with English surtitles on a screen.

For Eninew, the Cree initially came as a challenge but she said taking it on has changed her life.

"My grandmother speaks fluent Cree and my whole life I had never understood her. That's the one person you want to talk to right? So having this language barrier is

pretty intense but coming into theatre I was able to pick up some of my language and start speaking," she said.

"What was really interesting was that I naturally had the intonations and the rhythm of the language even though I didn't necessarily understand a lot of the words I picked up the accent really easy... I wouldn't have had that experience if it wasn't for the production."

She also explained that she has a connection with the play that she feels many indigenous people can relate to.

"I think for a lot of indigenous people Christmas is a difficult time. For me personally I don't remember very many Christmas when my dad was around because he was out partying," she said.

"It's supposed to be a time where we come together and it's supposed to be festive and happy. So, I think it's been important to bring that wholesomeness back into it and in a way that's not pretentious. In a way that we can relate to."

The play also carries a message for non indigenous people that Eninew said was important to the play's writer Curtis Peeteetuce.

"I don't think it would be whole if you couldn't reach a cross culture. It wouldn't be as powerful if you couldn't reach across cultures and touch everybody's heart," she said.

The play runs from Nov. 28 to Dec. 8.

Tickets are available at the Remail Arts Centre Box Office or online at www.persephonetheatre.org.

265 BC Aboriginal students will share over \$800,000 in awards for college and university education this year

[Canada NewsWire](http://CanadaNewsWire)

November 27, 2013

The Irving K. Barber British Columbia Scholarship Society has granted a total of \$813,000 to a record 265 Aboriginal students in BC to support their studies at post-secondary colleges and universities throughout the province. This represents a near doubling in the number and value of Aboriginal Awards granted by the Society the previous year.

The Society's Aboriginal Awards program is funded from the returns on a \$12 million endowment fund established by the Province, and an additional \$2M fund created in

2012 to encourage more Aboriginal students to become teachers, and \$1M for Aboriginal students pursuing Masters and Doctoral studies. Awards of between \$1,000 and \$5,500 each are issued to students through a competitive process every year. The awards programs are intended to assist in removing barriers to higher education for the province's Aboriginal peoples.

"Throughout our province, more Aboriginal students are succeeding in their post-secondary studies and taking advantage of the exciting job opportunities," said Advanced Education Minister Amrik Virk. "Congratulations to these deserving students, and best of luck in your classes."

In accepting his 2013 Aboriginal Student Award, Gage LeBlanc, who is studying Business Administration at Camosun College, offered the following comment about its impact. "By granting me this award, the financial burden of post-secondary education has been extensively lightened. This will allow me to put more time and effort into my studies...and I am inspired to help others to make the decision to enter a college or university program."

"Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing demographic in our population and yet they are under-represented at our colleges and universities. Through these awards, the Irving K Barber Scholarship Society hopes to encourage more Aboriginal students to pursue post-secondary education to secure the skills and training they will need to reach their full potentials. "said Society Chair, Hugh Gordon.

The [Irving K. Barber BC Scholarship Society](#) provides scholarships to students attending public post-secondary institutions throughout the province and internationally. Since its inception, the Society has awarded over \$5 million from its six scholarship and award programs.

Editors Please Note: A complete list of 2013 Aboriginal Student Award recipients can be found at www.bcscholarship.ca/web/news

SOURCE Victoria Foundation

Whistler Film Festival announces Aboriginal Fellowship

[Vancouver Sun](#)

November 26, 2013

Mary Frances Hill



The four finalists include Elle-Maija Tailfeather, who is working on a short documentary project. Photograph by: UBC, Screengrab

The [Whistler Film Festival](#) has just announced the names of the creative burgeoning filmmakers who will benefit from mentoring in its first ever Aboriginal Filmmaker Fellowship.

In a year that the festival will be screening its strongest contingent of Aboriginal-based films

WFF's Director of Programming, Paul Gratton, said it's apropos that the finalists are such advanced artists.

The four finalists include: Elle-Maijia Tailfeather, who is working on a short documentary project, Dad; Jay Cardinal Villeneuve, the director of the short drama Mikiwam, Roseanne Supernault with a short drama, Hope; and Sarah Hager with thought-provoking short sci-fi, Disorder.

Each filmmaker will be paired with mentors, including actor and director Lorne Cardinal, producer Cynde Harmon and actress, writer and singer Andrea Menard and director and actor Marie Clements. They'll mentor the filmmakers on film development and short-form storytelling.

The [Whistler Film Festival](#) runs Dec. 4 to 8. For more on the schedule and film offerings.

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Aboriginal women targeted for breast cancer screenings: Breast Cancer Action Nova Scotia says test are low off reserve

[CBC News](#)

Nov 27, 2013 8:18 AM AT



Breast cancer is the leading type of cancer and cause of cancer deaths in women worldwide. Nearly 1.4 million new cases are diagnosed each year. (CBC)

Aboriginal women across the province need more encouragement to get regular mammograms and screenings, according to

Breast Cancer Action Nova Scotia.

The organization's executive director, Barbara Thompson, said she wants to see breast health information that speaks to aboriginal people.

"When we did the research we realized there was nothing out there for them on this subject and our whole approach as a provincial group is that every woman in the

province, regardless of what culture they are part of, should have access to information, breast health information," she said.

One of the group's studies showed that test rates for women who live off reserves were particularly low. The National Aboriginal Health Organization has also reported that breast cancer among aboriginal people is on the rise.

"The women who are off reserve, if they are out of their social circles their support circles they are the ones that really need the support," said Thompson.

Debbie Eisan of the Halifax Aboriginal Peoples Network agrees with the need to target aboriginal women.

"We need to be strong in order to look after our families. Without this screening done, we won't be strong," she said.

Thompson said her group is reaching out through social media and community newspapers to urge aboriginal women to get tested.

Peaceful walk held to stop violence against First Nations women: Aboriginal community raises awareness

[News Talk 650 CKOM](#)

Nov 27, 2013 4:47pm

Andrew Shepherd



First Nations community holds peace walk on Albert Street. Photo by Andrew Shepherd/News Talk Radio.

The First Nations community held a peaceful walk Wednesday morning to raise awareness of violence against aboriginal women.

Members of the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council and the Regina Treaty/Status Indian Services met at Creland Mini Mart and walked down Albert towards Victoria Park.

Some carried signs that said "Stop the violence" and "One more is too many" as they followed a truck with men sitting in the cab singing and beating on native drums.

Regina Police Service Chief Troy Hagen says not only did the walk raise awareness, but it also provided another opportunity to educate.

There have been six missing or murdered aboriginal women in Regina since 2005 and Hagen said drug abuse is often involved in those cases. He explained when people use drugs they have blurred judgment, which leads to bad choices.

"That's one of the tragic consequences of drug abuse, which turns to abuse."

He stressed the importance of making the right choices in terms of who you associate with.

"You look at prostitution for example, selling yourself to make money. That's a very tragic circumstance and they're placing themselves in very high-risk situations," said Hagen.

Police are working diligently to solve the open cases of missing aboriginal women. Although Hagen couldn't comment on details he said there is progress.

"Police are always asking...This is one of the advantages of an event like this because it does raise profile in the community."

Hagen said in many instances there are people who have knowledge about an open case that haven't come forward. He invited those people to contact their police service, RCMP or Crime Stoppers with any information.

Prince Albert Métis Women planning AIDS awareness activities

[Prince Albert Herald](#)

November 27, 2013

Jodi Schellenberg



Education is the key to understanding any disease, including HIV and AIDS.

© Submitted photo

The Prince Albert Métis Women Association is planning many activities for Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Week, which will start after World AIDS Day on Sunday.

The week will start with a walk at 1 p.m. to City Hall, organizer Lindsay Seesequasis said.

"It is just going to be from the courthouse down to City Hall," Seesequasis said. "I don't know if it is going to be cold or not and I don't want to freeze people."

On Tuesday, the association will be hosting a movie matinee at the P.A. Métis Women boardroom.

"I wanted to show Ken Ward's movie," Seesequasis said. "It is A Journey of an AIDS Activist. He has lived with HIV for 25 years this year."

The activities will continue with a sharing circle and beading session and two speakers during a luncheon on Wednesday.

"We are going to have Donna Lerat speaking and also Doris Peltier," Seesequasis said. "I am going to have someone here to show us how to bead HIV ribbons."

Peltier is a Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network leadership co-ordinator, who will be speaking about the Getting to Zero campaign and the impacts of HIV on Aboriginal women. Lerat will also speak about the impact of HIV on women, but also about prevention, giving women insight into the disease and tools to teach their families about the infection.

"On Thursday, I was thinking of having a Hot Chocolate Social," Seesequasis said. "That would just be people come in throughout the whole day, have some hot chocolate and I can give them information and answer any questions. It is just getting to know people."

Educating people about infections and diseases like HIV and AIDS is extremely important, Seesequasis said.

"The more education there is out there to people who don't think they are at risk, the more people know and the less stigma and discrimination that surrounds the disease," Seesequasis said. "More people (should know) that know you can't get it from kissing, that you can't get it from hugging, it is blood to blood contact or sex are the only ways it can really happen."

The education will also help people with the infection be accepted into society, she said.

"As long as people know they can't get HIV that way, the people who are positive won't be so shunned," Seesequasis said. "Right now, there was a lady I talked to and she just found out she is HIV positive and her family totally disowned her."

Many people who are HIV positive have to deal with this stigmatism, Seesequasis explained.

"That's what they have to deal with because nobody (understands)," Seesequasis said. "They still live in that time where you can't kiss and you can't touch or talk to them because you'll get it. That's because they aren't educated and don't know that

this disease is everywhere now. It is not just a gay man's disease. Anybody is at risk. If you are not protecting yourself, you are at risk."

Seesequasis, who is Lerat's daughter, has been working in this field since June, she said.

"Working in the field, I have learned so much and I just want to help people and help break the stigma and discrimination," Seesequasis said. "I love to educate, going out and talking to people and bringing awareness, helping people in any way I can."

Displaced Attawapiskat residents unsure of return home: Local MP argues crisis highlights lack of federal housing strategy

[CBC News](#)

Nov 28, 2013 7:29 AM ET



Residents of the First Nations community of Attawapiskat are facing an uncertain timeline for returning home after a fire destroyed housing trailers in the community last Friday, displacing about eighty people.

On Wednesday, 67 people were still in Kapuskasing, Ont., where they had been evacuated over the weekend. Trailers that had been donated by the mining company DeBeers in 2007 after a sewage backup destroyed several houses served as temporary homes for many residents.

Angus: housing strategy needed

Timmins-James Bay MP Charlie Angus argued on Wednesday that the situation in Attawapiskat underlines the need for a long-term housing strategy for the region.

"We have an enormous short-fall of housing on the James Bay Coast," Angus told the CBC. "We have people who are working and want to rent to own, people who are willing to put down to be able to have a secure future. But we don't have the province at the table or the federal government at the table."

In a statement to the CBC, Bernard Valcourt, the federal minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, said the federal government is committed to finding sustainable housing solutions in the community.

Valcourt added that federal officials are working with the First Nation to construct four semi-detached homes in Attawapiskat, set to be completed by next fall.

Ottawa's First Nations education plan 'unacceptable,' AFN chief says

[Globe and Mail](#)

Monday, Nov. 25 2013, 4:21 PM EST

Gloria Galloway



Assembly of First Nations Chief Shawn Atleo at his office in Ottawa. DAVE CHAN for The Globe and Mail (Dave Chan For The Globe and Mail)

The head of Canada's largest aboriginal group says legislation proposed by the federal government to improve the dismal outcomes of First Nations schools is inadequate and "unacceptable."

Shawn Atleo, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, wrote to Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt on Monday to set out five conditions that must be met before native people will support the government's proposals for changing the way reserve schools are operated and funded.

In that letter, Mr. Atleo said the government must give First Nations control over their children's education; there must be a guarantee of adequate funding; there

must be a commitment to promote First Nations languages and education; the government cannot assume it will provide unilateral oversight; and there must be meaningful engagement going forward.

"We see it [the legislation] as being a real threat and an effort to, in essence, offload liability for what is a key federal obligation" to support First Nations education, Mr. Atleo said.

"A new approach is required," Mr. Atleo said in a telephone interview with The Globe and Mail. "There is also a sense that we've got to get this right for the kids and we've got to do this now. It's not about punting it down the road."

The urgency is reinforced by the fact that just 38 per cent of First Nations people living on reserve between the ages of 18 and 24 have completed high school, compared with 87 per cent for the non-aboriginal population.

The First Nations Education Act angered native leaders from the moment it was tabled in the House of Commons last month. Chiefs complained that the consultation had been inadequate, that the bill did not give them enough control over education in their communities, and that it promised only that the funding issue would be dealt with in regulations at some future date.

Mr. Atleo said Mr. Valcourt has hinted that he would be willing to pull the legislation off the table if there was not enough support from the First Nations.

Mr. Valcourt's spokeswoman, Erica Meekes, would not confirm that the minister is prepared to see the bill scrapped. Instead, she said government officials continue to hold discussions and consultations on the proposal across the country, and there is no deadline to provide feedback.

"Money alone will not improve on-reserve education or the outcomes of First Nation students," Ms. Meekes said. "Study after study has said that we must put in place a system of education which gives First Nation students the same legislative base, rights and opportunities as all other students in this country."

But an assurance about money is a central demand of the First Nations who argue that their schools have been underfunded and falling further behind provincial schools every year since 1996.

The RCMP documents released last week about the \$90,000 paid by Nigel Wright, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's former chief of staff, to cover living expenses claimed improperly by disgraced Senator Mike Duffy, included a memo from Mr. Wright to Mr. Harper complaining about Conservative senators who were not following "government messaging and direction."

Included in the off-message actions cited by Mr. Wright were reports from the Conservative-dominated Senate that "call on the government to ... invest heavily in aboriginal education."

Mr. Atleo said the documents highlight the fact that even the senators appointed by the Conservative government are aware that First Nations education is seriously underfunded.

Carolyn Bennett, the aboriginal affairs critic for the Liberals, said the documents show what the Conservative government really thinks about equitable funding for First Nations schools.

"This peek behind the scenes of the Conservative machine," said Ms. Bennett, "underscores why we cannot trust Minister Valcourt when he says we should just pass government legislation reforming First Nations education without any money attached and trust that 'funding will follow.'"

First Nations relations a hurdle to \$650B in oil and gas development for West

[Montreal Gazette](#)

November 28, 2013 9:10 AM

Dene Moore



Haisla First Nation Hereditary Chiefs Clifford Smith, from left, Rod Bolton and Sam Robinson on the opening day of hearings for the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project in Kitimaat Village, B.C., in January 2012.

Photograph by: Darryl Dyck, *The Canadian Press*

VANCOUVER - There are more than 600 major resource projects worth \$650 billion planned in Western Canada over the

next decade but relations with First Nations may be a major hurdle for those developments, says a new report by the Fraser Institute.

Every one of those projects will affect at least one First Nations Community, said the report released Thursday by the right-leaning think tank based in Vancouver.

"There is not a single oil or gas project under proposal in Western Canada that does not affect at least one First Nations community, and the willingness of these

communities to participate in energy development can be the factor that determines the success of a project," said the report.

In British Columbia, there are currently seven major oil and gas projects proposed, affecting an estimated 56 of the 198 First Nations in the province, it said.

In Alberta, five proposed oil projects touch 44 per cent of aboriginal communities and though only two projects are in the works in Saskatchewan, those two projects impact 23 per cent of all First Nations in the province, the report said.

The aboriginal community is among the fastest growing in the country, expanding 45 per cent from 1996 to 2006. The non-native population during that same time frame grew by eight per cent.

But these communities, largely located in remote and rural areas, have a staggering unemployment rate of approximately 23 per cent, compared to 7.1 per cent for the nation as a whole, said the report written by the institute's Ravina Bains and Kenneth P. Green.

"If you look at the actual geographic location of where these communities are located, in many cases there aren't any other economic development opportunities around them," Bains said.

It's a potential labour force with an investment in the project's success, she said — if they are willing partners, that is.

"Yes there are obstacles in place, but we're at a unique point right now in terms of the demographics of these communities, in terms of the young population, that we can really tap into and make sure that we cultivate," Bains said.

Those obstacles include education. Fewer than half of First Nations' youth successfully complete high school, compared to approximately 80 per cent of non-native youth.

Willingness is another.

"Despite the potential for economic prosperity, there are many First Nations' communities that are opposed to resource development," the report said.

Among the seven projects proposed in B.C. are Enbridge's Northern Gateway and Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain oil pipelines — two projects facing potential failure because of First Nations opposition.

Bains said there is hope for reconciling First Nations and the resource industry.

She cites the Haisla Nation's participation in the Douglas Channel Energy Partnership and the Kitimat liquefied natural gas project with Chevron and Apache. The band is also involved in the BC LNG proposal and the Shell Kitimat LNG Terminal, but opposed to the Northern Gateway pipeline.

The report makes five recommendations for fixing the relationship between business and First Nations, including better communication and transparency from the outset, and developing an understanding of the communities involved.

Bains said government also has a role to play in clarifying the duty to consult, and addressing the education gap.

Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Week shines a light on HIV rates among indigenous people

Straight.com

Nov 27, 2013 at 3:10 pm

Yolande Cole



Valerie Nicholson is working on a study looking at barriers faced by HIV-positive women. Yolande Cole

Valerie Nicholson remembers the room going silent the day she received her diagnosis.

After the doctor told her she had HIV, she was sent to another room to receive her medication, a place that she recalls as "the most scary thing in

my life". And after the initial revelation, she didn't absorb anything that followed.

"I remember sitting there: I didn't hear a word she said," Nicholson recalled in an interview with the *Georgia Straight*.

It would be another two years before she began taking regular treatment for HIV, a result that she attributes to barriers to accessing information and education about HIV at the time.

"I was literally on my own," she said. "I fell through the cracks."

When she did return to seek medical treatment, fearing a lecture, her doctor simply told her: "Valerie, let's get started."

"There was no 'Why haven't you been here in two years?' " Nicholson noted. "I was really near death, and she saved my life."

Nicholson, an aboriginal woman, has since devoted her time to working with others facing similar barriers, and is currently helping to recruit and survey HIV-positive women as part of a study of the factors that can keep them from accessing care.

Angela Kaida, an SFU health sciences assistant professor and a principal investigator for the Canadian HIV Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Cohort Study (CHIWOS), noted that women don't fit the typical profile associated with being HIV-positive.

"Seventy-five percent of people living with HIV in B.C. are men, so that's certainly a reality," she told the *Straight* in a phone interview.

"So women are 25 percent of that, but the issues and the priorities for women, of course, are quite different, and so [it's about] making sure that the services also meet the needs of one in four people who are infected with HIV."

According to Kaida, some of the typical barriers that women can face in accessing care include poverty, food insecurity, and unstable housing.

CHIWOS, which is the country's largest longitudinal, community-based study, was launched in October and will enroll more than 1,250 women living with HIV in B.C., Ontario, and Quebec.

In B.C., a high proportion of women with HIV are aboriginal, Kaida noted.

"Among women, we're really seeing that aboriginal women are overrepresented and disproportionately affected by HIV," she stated.

"There's been some really thoughtful studies—nationally and, as well, from people working in B.C.—around some of the reasons for that, and we know about the histories of systemic racialization, ongoing poverty, the history of residential schools, and the impact it's had on generations of people of aboriginal descent."

The disproportionate number of indigenous people affected by HIV, compared to the general population, is the focus of Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Week, which launches on December 1, World AIDS Day, in Halifax.



Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network CEO Ken Clement is aiming to enhance HIV/AIDS awareness in aboriginal communities. Yolande Cole

Ken Clement, CEO of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN), pointed out that HIV infection rates are 3.5 times higher in aboriginal communities than among nonaboriginal Canadians.

The focus of this year's awareness week, which concludes on December 6 with an event at the Bill Reid Centre for Northwest Coast Art Studies, is "getting to zero"—zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths.

"We have a long way to go, but at the same time I think an awareness campaign like this always triggers people to think," Clement told the *Straight* in an interview.

"We have high youth rates...in the aboriginal communities, and they're the ones we need to ensure get the message loud and clear. I think this is one way of doing it."

Clement, who is also a school trustee and the first aboriginal politician elected in Vancouver, has been involved with CAAN for 15 years, acting as CEO for the past five.

As the Ktunaxa First Nation member recounted, it was the loss of his brother Chris, and friends before that, that prompted him to begin working in the field.

"My brother was HIV-positive," he said. "And the first time we actually knew about it was when he was dying at St. Paul's [Hospital]."

And he had been living with HIV for about 10 years.

"When I look at my brother's experience...he was probably challenged with issues like stigma, discrimination, and all those other things, so from that perspective, it made me start thinking of, 'What can I do in a professional way? How can I contribute?' "

To this day, Clement often thinks of Chris in his work with the organization.

"And not only my brother but the many aboriginal people who have left this world—and, in a lot of cases, sooner than they should have," he said.

An estimated 8.9 percent of aboriginal people in Canada were living with HIV/AIDS in 2011, and that same year more than 12 percent of all new HIV infections occurred among aboriginal people, according to Public Health Agency of Canada data provided by CAAN. Aboriginal people make up less than five percent of the general population.

Injection drug use is the main cause of exposure to HIV for aboriginal people, and aboriginal women and men are almost equally affected by HIV.

Trevor Stratton, the International Indigenous Working Group on HIV & AIDS coordinator for CAAN, has been living with HIV since he was diagnosed in 1990.

"I developed AIDS in about 1997 or '98, just after they came out with the new antiretrovirals, and it was the aboriginal community [that] really reached out to me," he told the Straight in a phone interview.

"I felt like I wasn't the only one. I felt like there are people like me, aboriginal people like me with HIV, but not only like me: there's babies and grandmothers and just everybody across the spectrum. And it was really part of my healing to be part of the solution and to be joining the group, taking my rightful place back in my community and trying to make it better."

Stratton described stigma as "the biggest barrier" facing aboriginal communities when it comes to HIV.

"The more isolated and out there our communities are, the harder it is to get information in or out," he said. "Because of the legacy of colonization, our communities have had people knocking on the door for centuries, saying 'We know what's best for you.'"

"The trust has been really broken with aboriginal people, and that is a huge barrier for getting information in and trying to support research," he added. "We have to be very careful not to bulldoze through and to respect the protocols and the unique culture of each community and make sure that they're onboard and they help to develop and come up with the solutions that are appropriate for them."

Nicholson noted that in participating as a peer research associate with CHIWOS, she wanted to ensure that the language being used as part of the survey was culturally respectful.

"The Downtown Eastside is just sort of survey central," she said. "And we call them drive-bys: where they come in, they wave \$20 or \$5, you know, and we never see or hear what happened to those surveys. This study, we know that it's going to come back to our communities."

Kaida explained that many of the peer research associates working on the study come from long-standing service with community groups that they will be able to relay the information back to.

"The whole point of initiating this type of intensive process is to impact decisions and to make change," she said. "Including the decision makers and policymakers and community groups and clinicians that actually do have decision-making power in the process is part of what we think is critical to actually move research into action."

Given her own experiences, Nicholson is determined to ensure that others don't face the same barriers that she did. Her goals include setting up an online support network for HIV-positive women and establishing peer-to-peer counselling at clinics so that patients don't need to be alone when they receive their diagnosis.

"I never want to see another woman, or anyone, fall through the cracks," she said.

Remembering Métis veterans even more special at Lac Pelletier monument

[Prairie Post](#)

Nov 27, 2013

Matthew Liebenberg

The monument to honour 16 Métis war veterans from the valley was completed during the summer and officially unveiled Aug. 3.

Prairie Dog Métis Local 123 President Cecile Blanke said 13 people attended the brief ceremony at the monument.

"We had a wreath laying, we had smudging and blessing with sweet grass and we also had singing and drumming and prayer," she mentioned. "Our smudging and our blessing with sweetgrass went really well and it did a lot for everybody that was there."

Five wreaths were placed at the monument. Most of those in attendance are relatives of the veterans whose names are inscribed on the plaque.

"We were so pleased," she said. "We could go out there and solely honour our Métis veterans. That was a real special day, even though it was cold, but we made the effort to go out there and do it."

This was the start of an annual Remembrance Day celebration that will take place at the monument.

"If the weather permits and the roads are OK we are planning to go out there every year," she said.

The monument has been erected to recognize the contribution of 16 Métis men and women who left their families in Lac Pelletier Valley to serve Canada in the First and Second World War and the Korean War.

According to Blanke, there will most likely be an annual event in August to celebrate the anniversary of the monument's official unveiling.

"We'll probably go and have a gathering again for people that couldn't make it or couldn't be there, so we'll probably plan on an anniversary," she said.

The flags at the monument were taken down at the end of summer but reinstalled for the Remembrance Day service and they will now remain there throughout the year.

"We want everybody that lives at the lake or goes fishing in the winter to see our flags," she said.

"They can know we've placed the monument there and we're proud to honour our Métis veterans."

Birchbark canoe launch celebrates collaborative art and culture

[University of Wisconsin-Madison News](#)

Nov. 27, 2013

Susannah Brooks



Tim Frandy, an outreach specialist at the UW Collaborative Center for Health Equity, and Wayne Valliere, a Native American artist-in-residence and member of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, push off in a traditional Ojibwe birchbark canoe for an inaugural paddle in Lake Mendota near the Memorial Union on Nov. 21. Photos: [Jeff Miller](#)

As Wayne Valliere prepared to launch a traditional birchbark canoe into the choppy waters of Lake Mendota on Thursday, Nov. 21, members of the crowd scanned the horizon. The fog on the lake hid the modern water tower, houses and power lines on the far shore.

"The lake almost looks like it might have hundreds of years ago," said an onlooker.

Valliere, known as Mino-Giizhig in Ojibwe, addressed the crowd of approximately 150 people before the launch.

"I don't know how long it's been since an Anishinaabe birchbark canoe has ventured into these waters," he said, holding his young daughter in his arms.



Valliere makes some introductory remarks before the launch. He is holding his two-year-old daughter, Beshaagiizhigookwe. Her Ojibwe name means "Stripe in the sky woman."

Valliere sees the canoe project — "These Canoes Carry Culture" — as a way to pass on Ojibwe heritage to a new generation. Building the canoe with UW-Madison collaborators has

brought together art, folklore and living culture, helping its builders recognize the physical and spiritual importance of the entire process.

The canoe, known as a wiigwaasi-jiimaan in Ojibwe, had been under construction since mid-July, but the planning process had started nearly a year before. A member of the [Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians](#), Valliere is one of three Native canoe builders remaining in the state of Wisconsin. [Tom Loeser](#), chair of the [Art Department](#), brought Valliere to campus as artist-in-residence for UW-Madison's woodworking program during the fall semester.

Throughout the build, Valliere had reinforced the idea that "the more hands that are laid on this canoe, the more good energy and power the canoe has. The canoe took shape with the help of UW-Madison faculty and art students, as well as middle-school students from Lac du Flambeau school district's ENVISION program and Madison's Goodman Community Center.



Valliere installs steam-bent cedar wood ribs as he constructs the canoe at the Mosse Humanities Building with Frandy assisting. In the background, left to right, are sixth-grade students Lorrina BigJohn, Aiyana Beson and Mackenzie Smith from Lac du Flambeau.

Aside from the artistic and cultural components, the program was designed as a preventative and culturally-situated intervention to improve health and wellness outcomes within targeted youth.

"Canoe building brings people together," said folklorist Tim Frandy of UW-Madison's [Collaborative Center for Health Equity](#) in his remarks before the launch. "And as Wayne has explained to us, it's healthy for the four sides of self: the mind, the body, the emotions and the spirit."

A [blog](#) has documented the process, from the physical labor of harvesting the natural materials in the Northwoods to the spiritual and educational components that reinforce the ties of the ENVISION students to Native cultures.



Spruce wood root is part of stitching used to weave together the bark "hide" and gunnel rails of the canoe.

The launch day dawned cold and windy, but a feast in the woodshop helped underscore the day's celebrations. About 40 ENVISION students piled into a bus and traveled from Lac du Flambeau to share their paintings of the wiigwaasi-jiimaan, along with homemade venison stew, frybread, and wild rice soup.

Students from Madison's Goodman Community Center and UW-Madison's Wunk Sheek group joined the festivities, celebrating a true "intergenerational, intercultural, environmental arts project."

"For those of us who have worked on the canoe, we've known this canoe since the time it was still in the woods," said Frandy. "We knew that birchbark when we peeled it from the trees in June. We knew the ribs and sheathing when we packed cedar out of the forest and split it by hand in July. We knew those lashings when we dug spruce roots in August. And that pitch [used

for sealing the seams] we knew when we knocked pine pitch off trees in September.”

Harper must step in over Aboriginal child-in-care deaths, says Sherman: Alberta Liberal Leader says deaths violate federal treaty obligations

[CBC News](#)

Nov 28, 2013 12:44 PM MT



Prime Minister Stephen Harper should call a full independent inquiry into the deaths of Aboriginal and Metis children in care of the Alberta government, says the leader of the province’s Liberal party.

In a letter sent to Harper and the country’s opposition leaders, Raj Sherman calls on the federal government to look into the high rate of deaths among Aboriginal, Metis and Inuit children in provincial care.

“The Alberta Government has failed to deliver reasonable care to the First Nations, Metis and Inuit children-in-care in Alberta, and in doing so has placed you in breach of your treaty obligations,” Sherman wrote.

Sherman says that 78 per cent of deaths in the provincial care system have been of Aboriginal or Metis children, who only make up nine per cent of the province’s youth.

Alberta opposition parties have been calling for an inquiry into the number of deaths of children in care following an Edmonton Journal/Calgary Herald investigations that found a total of 145 children died while in care since 1999.

During the time, the province only reported 56 of the deaths.

Sherman’s letter notes that children in care is a provincial issue, but that he believes the federal government’s jurisdiction over Aboriginal affairs gives them the power to step in and call an inquiry.

"We have the moral obligation and desire to help these children, but the government of Canada has the power to protect these children and we need you to intervene," Sherman writes.

Sherman has asked for a prompt reply from the Prime Minister.

Aboriginal Affairs ignores Manitoba First Nation ravaged by deadly fire

[APTN National News](#)

November 28, 2013

Kenneth Jackson

About two years after a fire claimed the lives of three people in a remote northern Manitoba First Nation in 2011 Aboriginal Affairs turned down a funding request to train a member of the community to become a certified firefighter according to the Keewatin Tribal Council.

And to this day none of the 11 communities under the watch and care of KTC have certified firefighters.

This worries Ivan Hart, the KTC fire prevention officer in charge of the communities, as temperatures turn freezing and fires become the norm.

Hart said he applied for about \$140,000 in funding from Aboriginal Affairs in the spring to train one member from each community to become certified firefighters.

His detailed written proposals never got a response before the deadline to begin training.

Hart said he then called Darrell Fiel, Aboriginal Affairs manager of capital and housing in Winnipeg, to find out if the federal government was going fund what he says was a small amount of money to save lives.

"He (Fiel) said there was no money. I was obviously disappointed," said Hart who, alone, tries to train members of the communities on fire prevention and firefighting and does so on a budget of about \$60,000 annually, that includes his salary.

Of the 11 communities, seven has "fire chiefs" but they aren't certified.

That includes God's Lake Narrows First Nation.

Demus James, 73, Kayleigh Okemow, 3, and Throne Kirkness, 2, died in a fire March 14, 2011 on God's Lake.

An inquest has been called into their deaths to determine what can be learned and potentially save lives in the future.

The same members of the inquest are looking at a separate fire at St. Thersea Point First Nation where Errabella Angel Harper, an infant, died in a fire Jan. 16, 2011.

The St. Theresa inquest is set for March 17-19, while the God's Lake inquest began this past summer and continues in March as well.

Hart testified at the God's Lake inquest about being turned down for funding by Aboriginal Affairs.

He also told the inquest that between January and June of this year there was more than \$3 million in damages due to fires, but, luckily, no fatalities, in the KTC communities.

"I go into the communities whenever I can and I give them one week training. It's not a certified course, but at least they have something, right?" said Hart. "They do what they can with what they have. Do they have a fire truck? Do they have the proper equipment? The majority of the communities don't."

Seven of the communities have fire trucks and fire chiefs trained by Hart and *APTN* asked him what happens if there is a fire at one of the communities that doesn't have either.

"Hopefully, everybody gets out of the house," he said. "Often there is nothing they can do. That's the reality of it. The ones that do have a fire truck and firefighters in the community there is also a communication problem."

They either run to houses to get help or use telephones.

It turns out KTC isn't alone.

Many Manitoba First Nations struggle to battle fires according to a 2012 report obtained by *APTN*.

Between January 2012 to September 2012 a program officer from Manitoba's Office of the Fire Commissioner visited 61 First Nations across the province surveying what plans and equipment they had in place.

The results are startling.

Of the 61 communities, four had a formalized protection plan in place. Seven had fire bylaws and 12 had a fire protection officer.

Thirty-eight First Nations said they relied on other communities to provide assistance, although just 24 per cent had an agreement in writing.

The report found only seven communities had a pager system in place in the event of a fire to alert people.

Some said they sent text messages.

Other firefighting equipment was scarce as well.

Nine communities said they had sufficient amount of fire hose and 14 said they had an adequate supply of ladders, axes and generators.

While, 47 communities said they had fire hydrants, 45 used lakes, 37 ran to rivers, 22 depended on ponds and 21 had water tankers.

In the case of the God's Lake fatal fire community members can be seen throwing snow in the engulfed home as reported in this [APTN story](#).

"Many fire departments were not aware of what the community's fire protection budget was," the report says. "Although all communities stated that they were part of an association that provides fire support, most were unable to specify the nature of the support that was available."

Based on the report's findings it was determined most of the First Nations in Manitoba were not in a position to respond to a fire.

"It was also noted that First Nation fire department members generally are less likely to have received formal training than their municipal counterparts," the report says.

That's interesting because the Auditor General of Canada released a report in Ottawa this week saying Aboriginal Affairs officials said they didn't know if First Nations across Canada received the same level of service in the event of an emergency like a fires or floods.

Aboriginal Affairs was a partner in the report and would have had knowledge of its findings as a draft report was finished by March of this year. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs was also a partner.

The Auditor General's report concluded the majority of First Nations across Canada are ill-equipped to handle emergencies.

The feds depend on provinces to provide emergency care for First Nations but only four provinces have emergency management plans in place with Ottawa, a system that helps provinces recover costs.

Manitoba is one of the provinces that do not.

Aboriginal Affairs allocates about \$19 million annually to support the emergency management program and the Auditor General found this was not sufficient.

As a result, Aboriginal Affairs dips in to capital funding to cover shortfalls in the program and that means other programs are either delayed or canceled.

Many times First Nations were left to fend for themselves.

As for Hart, he was told by Aboriginal Affairs to put a request in this fall to see if the funding would be approved.

He emailed Fiel this week because "I wanted something in writing this time."

Hart said he hasn't heard back yet.

APTN called Fiel Thursday and he said he needed to do a "little research" and would get back to *APTN*.

APTN asked the AMC to provide Grand Chief Derek Nepinak for an interview on fire safety but was told Nepinak was unavailable for interviews this week.

Robert Pike, deputy commissioner of Manitoba Office of the Fire Commissioner, said when they did the survey they had a good idea of what they were going to find and weren't surprised by the findings.

Pike said other non-First Nation communities face similar challenges across Manitoba as well.

Pike said it's important to drive home fire prevention and that's what his office does.

And with the cold winter months ahead that means not having extension chords under carpets, keeping an eye on woodstoves and being careful cooking with oil.

He said smoking in homes is also a problem and people need to be more careful.

"It's Christmastime so people are going to be using candles in their homes and they are going to be smoking in their homes and smoking is the one of the biggest causes of fires," said Pike.

The fire commissioner's office works with tribal councils to assist in fire prevention but doesn't provide funding. The office was behind Hart's proposal to train members of the KTC communities but couldn't because the federal government didn't supply the funding.

Fate of First Nations education reform plan undecided: Bernard Valcourt

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Mark Kennedy



Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Bernard Valcourt. Photograph by: Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press, Postmedia News

OTTAWA — Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt hinted Thursday the federal government might drop a legislative plan for reforming First Nations education if it can't get the support of aboriginal leaders. At the same time, he suggested the governing Tories might decide to press ahead over the "rhetorical" objections of some.

Valcourt made the comments after appearing at a Commons committee, where he touted the benefits of the proposed bill the government had hoped to introduce in Parliament in the coming weeks or months.

However, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) came out strongly this week against the bill, of which a draft was publicly circulated last month for reaction.

The AFN called the proposed bill "unacceptable" and outlined five conditions which must be met — immediately raising the political question of whether the Conservative government would proceed over the objections of the country's aboriginal chiefs.

While speaking to journalists, Valcourt was asked if the bill will still be introduced if the government can't get the AFN onside.

"This is a decision which the government will have to take at some point in time," the minister replied.

He stressed that he's still hopeful consultations will lead to an agreement with First Nations on the educational reforms.

But pressed on whether continued aboriginal resistance could lead to the proposed bill being put on ice, Valcourt suggested it could go either way.

"Everything is possible. Just like it is possible that if we cannot convince some people because they have rhetorical arguments only, that we will proceed.

"But we are not there yet. The question now, as we speak, is let's dialogue, let's consult on them and see how we can ensure that we get to the objective which we all share. Which is to have a good system in place which will produce results."

The proposed reforms are a central plank in the government's aboriginal affairs agenda. Sixty per cent of First Nations youths in their early 20s do not have a high school diploma, compared to 10 per cent among non-aboriginals.

Valcourt said the government has been hearing for years — including from aboriginals — that it is time to fix the problem.

"The fact remains that these youths are being failed, as we speak, every year by the non-system. So at some point the government will have to make a decision. You know, do we proceed in the best interests of First Nation youth the way we see it? And I'd rather prefer that we can come to an agreement with First Nations as to what is the best way."

Valcourt has said the bill will be "transformational" and historic in its potential ramifications, with better educated First Nations communities eventually seeing fewer social problems ranging from crime to suicide.

The draft bill sets out options on how schools can be governed by First Nations communities themselves, a provincial school board, or a native-run school board for the region.

Moreover, the schools will need to abide by educational standards. In cases where they fail to meet those standards, the aboriginal affairs minister can send in a "temporary administrator" to resolve the problem.

And ultimately, says the draft, the federal government will not have any legal “liability” for the actions or omissions of an authority established by First Nations to oversee education. The governing Tories want the bill passed in time so a new system is in place when First Nations children start their school year in September 2014. However, in an apparent compromise, Valcourt said Thursday that he’d be happy just to have legislation passed next year, with a transition phase for implementation that could be two to three years.

Aboriginal opposition to the plan has been building for months. Earlier this week, AFN national chief Shawn Atleo wrote a letter to Valcourt declaring that while First Nations strongly want a better education system for their children, the government’s current proposal is unacceptable.

Atleo outlined five basic “conditions” that are necessary if the plan is to be successful: First Nation control of education; guaranteed federal funding; protection of language and culture; joint “oversight” of the new education system; and “meaningful” consultation with aboriginals.

Aboriginal leaders are worried the draft bill contains no information on the level of funding the federal government would provide First Nations schools under a reformed system with new standards.

Instead, the bill says federal funding would, at some point, be set through regulations.

New Democrat MP Carol Hughes pushed Thursday for an assurance federal funding for aboriginal schools would be “equitable” to schools in provincial systems. But Valcourt spoke of funding that would be “predictable” and “sufficient”.

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First Nation Communities Read Celebrates 10th Anniversary with New Book Award Announcement

[Canada NewsWire](#)

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First Nation Communities Read, in partnership with Periodical Marketers of Canada (PMC), announced the inauguration of a significant new book award, the Aboriginal Literature Award. The award of \$5,000 is provided through a funding commitment from Periodical Marketers of Canada, the association of book and magazine distributors.

First Nation Communities Read, a program of the First Nations public library community in Ontario, promotes Aboriginal literacy, and increases national and

international awareness of the availability, importance, and relevance of Aboriginal literature. The launch of the Aboriginal Literature Award coincides with the tenth anniversary of the First Nations Community Read program to recognize creators of Aboriginal literature.

First Nation Communities Read focuses in alternate years on Aboriginal literature for adults and young adults, and Aboriginal literature for children. The current (2013-2014) selection is *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese. The 2014-2015 selection will be a children's titles.

The 2014-15 title selection will be announced in May, timed to encourage Aboriginal literature displays and programming during National Aboriginal History Month and National Aboriginal Day celebrations in June, when the first Aboriginal Literature Award will be presented.

On behalf of the members of Periodical Marketers of Canada (PMC), PMC Executive Director Ray Argyle said: "All of us at PMC feel privileged to fund this award which recognizes the work of the creators of outstanding Aboriginal literature and supports the objectives of our Foundation for the Advancement of Canadian Letters."

Speaking on behalf of First Nation Communities Read, Karen Foster, juror and librarian at Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation Public Library, added: "A funded award has been a longtime goal for us. This new partnership with Periodical Marketers of Canada is a wonderful 10th anniversary achievement. We look forward to beginning First Nation Communities Read's second decade with an enhanced program and the additional program stature PMA's endorsement provides."

Periodical Marketers of Canada (PMC) is the national association of magazine and book wholesalers serving 35,000 retail outlets and is the longtime sponsor of the Foundation for the Advancement of Canadian Letters (FACL). PMC was established under federal charter in 1942 for the purpose of furthering the wholesale periodical distribution industry and contributing to the encouragement of reading in Canada. Current members of the association are: Monahan Agency, Vernon, BC; Benjamin News, Montreal, QC; Metro News, Toronto, ON; The News Group, Burlington, ON. For more information about PMC, contact:

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First Nation Communities Read (FNCR) is an annual reading program launched in 2003 by the First Nations public library community in Ontario with support from Southern Ontario Library Service. Promoting a community-based approach to

reading, FNCR encourages family literacy, intergenerational storytelling, and intergenerational information sharing; increases awareness of the relevance and importance of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit writing, illustration, and publishing; promotes the publication, sharing, and understanding of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit voices and experiences; increases awareness and sales of the titles it honours.

Southern Ontario Library Service (SOLS) is mandated to deliver programs and services on behalf of the Ontario Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport by: increasing cooperation and coordination among public library boards and other information providers in order to promote the provision of library service to the public; assisting public library boards by providing them with services and programs that reflect their needs, including consultation, training and development.

First Nation Communities Read is funded in part by the Canada Book Fund at Canadian Heritage.